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SUBJECT: Lobo Commits Honduras to Protection of Human Rights

REF: TEGUCIGALPA 145; TEGUCIGALPA 65; 09 TEGUCIGALPA 1202  
09 TEGUCIGALPA 989

11. (SBU) Summary. President Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo signed the Chapultepec Declaration on press freedom in Tegucigalpa on February 18 and committed the Honduran government to support freedom of the press and human rights. Lobo's government abrogated on February 16 a disarmament decree enacted by the de facto regime in November 2009 and the National Congress recommended on February 9 that the Council of Ministers abrogate another de facto decree that empowered the National Telecommunications Commission (CONATEL) to revoke media licenses. These actions follow the January 20 signing by President Lobo in the Dominican Republic of the "Agreement for National Reconciliation and Strengthening of Democracy in Honduras" in which Lobo pledged to preside over a government that respects human rights. President Lobo appears committed to improving the human rights situation in Honduras, which had deteriorated significantly in the wake of the coup. End Summary.

Lobo Signs Declaration of Chapultepec

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12. (U) President Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo signed the Chapultepec Declaration on February 18 in Tegucigalpa during a press freedom forum organized by the Inter-American Press Society (SIP) and hosted by the Central American Technological University (UNITEC). The event received widespread coverage in national daily newspapers, including "El Tiempo," "La Prensa," and "El Heraldito." An article in the February 19 "El Heraldito" reported that during the event, President Lobo said the Honduran government was committed to investigating all allegations of human rights violations that have been raised in past years and quoted President Lobo as saying "believe me, sincerely, I respect human rights... and I am very strongly committed to respect for the unrestricted liberties of thought and opinion and this government requests your help to achieve this." Many press articles also reported that during President Lobo's remarks, he cited his experience in the 1980's as president of Committee for the Defense of Human Rights in the Department of Olancho.

13. (U) Note: Adopted by the Hemisphere Conference on Free Speech in Mexico City on March 11, 1994, the Chapultepec Declaration

establishes the central role of public freedoms and human rights, especially the freedom of press, in the consolidation of democracy.

The declaration affirms 10 principles outlining the importance of the freedom of expression and of the press. End Note.

#### Lobo Government Abrogates Decree Passed by De Facto Regime

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¶4. (U) The Council of Ministers voted on February 16 to abrogate executive decree PCM-M-031-2009, which was enacted by the de facto regime on November 21, 2009 and allowed for the revocation of all permits to carry firearms ahead of the November 29 general elections (ref C). A February 17 article in "El Herald" reported that an estimated 853 legally registered firearms and an unknown number of illegally registered firearms were confiscated under the disarmament decree. (Note: Under the Honduran law "Control of Arms and Explosives," Hondurans are allowed to possess up to five firearms with a permit. End note.)

¶5. (U) The congress unanimously approved a February 9 motion presented by member of congress Edwin Pavon, a member of the Democratic Union party representing the Department of Cortes, requesting that the Council of Ministers abrogate executive decree 124-2009. Decree 124-2009 was enacted by the de facto regime on October 5, 2009 and authorized CONATEL to cancel licenses of media outlets that "violate national security and public order" (ref D). The Council of Ministers had not yet taken action on the Congressional recommendation as of February 25.

#### The Agreement with President Fernandez

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¶6. (U) The signing of the Chapultepec Declaration by President Lobo followed the commitment President Lobo made when he signed the January 20 "Agreement for National Reconciliation and Strengthening of Democracy in Honduras" with President of the Dominican Republic President Leonel Fernandez (ref B). In the agreement, then President-elect Lobo committed himself to "head a government that respects human rights, in which there is full enjoyment of civil liberties and where no Honduran citizen is persecuted for his political, religious, or other convictions."

#### Comment

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¶7. (SBU) There was a serious deterioration in human rights during under the de facto Micheletti regime. While facing multiple and serious problems brought on by the political and economic crises, the Lobo government understands the importance of human rights and has made a strong and early public commitment to their protection. In our dealings with the new ministers of the Lobo government, including Minister of Security Oscar Alvarez (ref A), we have found that these interlocutors take the issue of human rights abuses seriously and have expressed a genuine willingness to investigate the wrongs committed prior to Lobo taking office. We will continue to support efforts by the Lobo government to keep human rights protections at the forefront.

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